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The Truth About Condensation



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Why Is There Condensation On My Windows?

The insulating properties of the glass used in energy efficient windows can cause condensation to collect on the glass under certain environmental conditions. Condensation does not occur on all windows, but it is not uncommon at certain times of the year.

Exterior Condensation

Exterior condensation results from the same environmental conditions that cause dew to appear on grass or condensation or frost to appear on a car that is parked outside overnight. It forms when moist air comes into contact with cool surfaces such as glass, when the dew point in the air is higher than the temperature of the glass. This can happen when a cool night follows a warmer day, typically during the spring and fall seasons. Condensation generally does not occur with less energy efficient windows, because heat from the warm interior of the home escapes through the window, keeping the exterior temperature of the glass high enough to prevent condensation.

In contrast, energy efficient windows significantly reduce the interior heat conducted through the glass. This lowers the temperature of the outside glass, which at a certain dew point can result in condensation. Exterior condensation is actually an indication that the insulating glass in your windows is performing as it should, reducing heat loss and lowering utility costs. It is a result of the normal functioning of energy efficient windows.

Interior Condensation

Condensation on interior surfaces of windows and doors occurs because of high humidity and low air exchange inside the home. In many older homes there were gaps in the windows where drafts could be felt and air would flow. This exchange of air, in many cases, was sufficient to prevent condensation from forming. The high-performance windows of today are designed to be air tight to reduce heat loss, which also reduces air flow. Two ways you can fight interior condensation are to reduce moisture sources (humidifiers, plants, aquariums, etc.) and increase ventilation (open windows for a few minutes each day, especially during steam-producing activities such as showering, laundry and cooking).

*Moisture that builds up between the panes of glass may be due to a failed insulating unit, and if so it should be repaired.

Other Factors Influencing Condensation

- **Window Size:** Larger windows may have a higher tendency to show condensation.
- **Window Location:** Minor differences in conditions can cause condensation to form on one window and not another, even when they are side-by-side. Windows protected from the wind will have a higher tendency to show condensation.
- **Air Circulation:** Good air circulation, such as exposure to wind, reduces the occurrence of condensation. Building projections, foliage and other wind-breaks may contribute to condensation.
- **Screens:** Windows protected by exterior screens may have different condensation than the same windows without screens under the same conditions.
- **Interior Shades:** Opening interior shades or blinds may reduce condensation by allowing more heat to transfer to the outside.
- **Weather Changes:** Condensation on windows can be a seasonal or a night-time event. When outside temperatures are warm, the glass temperature will usually be above the dew-point. The same is true during cold, winter months. Condensation will most often occur during transition months.

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